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SUBJECT: OMAN: JEWISH ENGAGEMENT

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Schmierer, Ambassador, Department of State,  
Embassy Muscat; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Several recent events have highlighted Oman's continuing openness to interfaith dialogue and, more specifically, its willingness to engage with Jewish, as opposed to "Zionist," interlocutors. October 21 press reported that Sultan Qaboos, the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs (MERA), and the Ministry of Higher Education signed an agreement with Cambridge University to establish the His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Chair for Abrahamic Religions at Cambridge. According to the press, "the establishment of the chair reflects the special importance His Majesty attaches to dialogue and interaction among the world religions and civilizations." MERA Minister Sheikh Adullah bin Mohammed al-Salimi traveled with Dr. Abdulrahman al-Salim, Editor of "Tolerance" Magazine, and Michael Bos, Director of the al-Amara Interfaith Center, to Cambridge to finalize and sign the agreement. Bos told poloff on October 17 that the initiative was driven by the Sultan himself. Bos also told us that prior to scheduling conflicts, a rabbi was slated to speak this season at the MERA-sponsored annual interfaith lecture series that is hosted at the Grand Mosque.

¶2. (C) On November 7-10, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) hosted a 12-member delegation from the American Jewish Council (AJC). The agenda included meetings with the Minister of Endowments and Religious Affairs, the Minister of Commerce and Industry and a dinner hosted by H.E. Sayyid Badr bin Hamed, Secretary General of Foreign Affairs. Amer al-Rashdi, Director of Religious Affairs at the MERA, told poloff on November 10 that his Minister welcomed the group's visit and told the AJC delegation that Arabs and Jews need to find better ways to communicate with each other. Al-Rashdi noted that it was easier to meet with Jews than with Israelis, as the discussion was more cultural and religious rather than political.

¶3. (C) Comment: Although carried out in a generally low key manner, Oman has traditionally welcomed Jewish delegations and hosted them at a governmental level. Inclusion of the Jewish faith in the Cambridge chair is further evidence of this acceptance. As a matter of religion (vice politics), Oman will continue to embrace people of other faiths, including Jews. These private initiatives are separate from official Omani contacts with various Israeli Government entities. End Comment.  
Schmierer